

# UFS Staff Guide to Student Crisis Intervention



Compiled by Student Counselling and Development (SCD)

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[www.ufs.ac.za/kovsiecounselling](http://www.ufs.ac.za/kovsiecounselling)

*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

## Notes and Emergency numbers:

**UFS SADAG Careline (24/7): 0800 00 6363**

**ER24 (24/7): 084 124**

**Protection Services (24/7)**

Bloemfontein campus: 051 401 2911/2634

South campus: 051 505 1217

Qwaqwa campus: 058 718 5460

**SCD (7:45 – 16:30) MON – FRI:**

051 401 2853 / 058 718 5125 / 051 505 1989

[scd@ufs.ac.za](mailto:scd@ufs.ac.za) / [scdqq@ufs.ac.za](mailto:scdqq@ufs.ac.za) / [scdsouth@ufs.ac.za](mailto:scdsouth@ufs.ac.za)

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# 1. Introduction

Most of our students in Higher Education are unfortunately not doing well with regards to their mental health and well-being. These challenges are significantly increasing nationally and globally. The COVID-19 pandemic's effects still have a vital impact on what our students are experiencing today. It is no different here at the University of the Free State (UFS).

This guide is one of the initiatives at UFS intended to promote a campus environment conducive to mental well-being. Staff who have been in the front line of student care for many years, might be familiar with most of what follows. However, many staff members are encountering such issues and do not feel equipped or trained to deal with it. This guide is primarily for them.

This guide has been compiled by staff at Student Counselling and Development (SCD), Division of Student Affairs and we hope that this can assist in your journey with students. SCD has developed a multi-layered approach to assist students and has taken hands with SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group) as well as ER24. These different role-players ensure that a 24/7 emergency service can be provided to all registered UFS students.

Any feedback or comments are welcomed, or please reach out when you need assistance:

DunnCoetzeeM@ufs.ac.za / 051 401 2853.

#Becausewecare

**Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee**  
**Director: Student Counselling and Development**

## 2. Glossary / Definitions / Examples

### Bizarre behaviour, thoughts & ideas

Sometimes a student might be experiencing a psychotic episode, due to a variety of reasons (sleep deprivation, substance use or linked to a mental health disorder). They may display strange thoughts, behaviours or ideas, such as "believing that others can hear his thoughts".

### Out of touch with reality

Similarly to bizarre behaviours, thoughts & ideas, a student may be out of touch with reality, when they are unable to state what day it is, or even answer other simple questions such as their name and date of birth.



### Developmental challenges

Most University students will be faced with normal developmental challenges, such as formalising their personal identity, establishing boundaries with family members or figuring out their sexuality. Experiencing challenging romantic, friendship or parental relationships is common for this developmental period.

### Spiritual / Ancestral Calling

When students have an ancestral calling, they experience many emotional, physical and spiritual symptoms. Psychological-like symptoms could include being overly emotional, feeling depressed, having suicidal thoughts, hearing voices and/or having hallucinations. It is thus important to note that sometimes a calling can present as symptoms of a mental health disorder, such as depression, anxiety, bizarre thoughts/behaviours or being out of touch with reality. E.g. a student in a spiritual trance may look like they are exhibiting psychosis. It helps to contact family members to get more information or clarification.



# Frequently Asked Questions



*Can I book an appointment for a student/ask SCD to contact them?  
(aka third party referrals)*

The Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA) states that participation in therapy is voluntary and that the client should freely and without undue influence consent to partake in the therapeutic process. Considering this, be aware of not coercing the student into a therapeutic process.

Staff can inform the student about SCD services and encourage them to reach out. Phoning/emailing on their behalf goes against the ethical rules set out by the HPCSA. The exception to this rule is when a student is unable to consent to a process, e.g. psychotic student. In which case an ambulance will need to be called out.

*Can you confirm if a student has booked an appointment, or tell me how they are doing?*



As Mental Health Professionals, we are registered under the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA). This means that we must always adhere to strict confidentiality and privacy guidelines. We hold information that is private and sensitive, and cannot divulge any information, without our clients' consent. This includes information related to attending sessions, as well as the content thereof.



# 3.UFS Student Mental Health Support

## STUDENT COUNSELLING AND DEVELOPMENT (SCD)

**STEP 1** Access our **online resources** which cover a variety of topics ranging from academic support to psychological wellbeing.

[#WellbeingWarriors](#)  
[UFS Student Toolkit](#)  
[SCD Website](#)

**STEP 2** Make use of the 24/7 toll-free **dedicated SADAG UFS Student Careline**

0800 00 6363  
SMS 43302  
[helpline@sadag.org](mailto:helpline@sadag.org)

**STEP 3** To schedule an appointment with a **Mental Health Professional (MHP)**, please contact us:



**BLOEMFONTEIN  
CAMPUS**

051 401 2853  
[SCD@ufs.ac.za](mailto:SCD@ufs.ac.za)

**QWAQWA  
CAMPUS**

058 718 5125  
[SCDQQ@ufs.ac.za](mailto:SCDQQ@ufs.ac.za)

**SOUTH  
CAMPUS**

051 505 1989  
[SCDSouth@ufs.ac.za](mailto:SCDSouth@ufs.ac.za)

# 4.Triage System:

## How to determine the urgency of a situation

### GREEN

*These are matters that may cause concern, but are not urgent.*

The student is experiencing distress, but is able to function despite these difficulties. The student's distress should be recognised and acknowledged, and possible treatment options should be discussed. This could involve referral to a psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor, social worker or local mental health service.

### ORANGE

*Situations that require urgent action / referral soon.*

This situation does not involve any immediate threat to life, but requires an active intervention to prevent significant suffering or deterioration in the functioning of the student. This will involve contact with a local mental health service or crisis assessment team, and following up with the student within hours or days.

### RED

*Immediate action is required.*

Is the student severely at risk of harming themselves or others (e.g. acute psychosis or major depression with suicide intent)?

This situation is treated as any other emergency and might involve hospitalisation and liaison with a mental healthcare facility.

# 5. What to do in situations of concern and urgency

Members of staff who become concerned about a student who appears low in mood, tearful, withdrawn or overly anxious, or who exhibits a deterioration in academic performance, should consider one or more of the following courses of action:

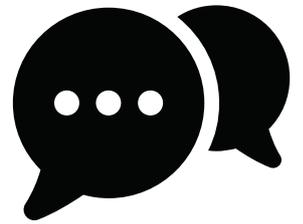
## Listen,

show support and offer available resource information. You are not required to take on the role of a therapist.

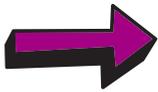


## Communicate

your concern to the student in a positive tone, pointing out the specific signs you have observed.



## Ask



how the student is coping and listen attentively to their response.



open-ended questions directly related to the concern and do not show any judgement.

## Allow

the student time to tell their story and do not be afraid of silences.



## Encourage

the student to consider obtaining the necessary support and suggest resources and referrals.



## Assure

the student that discussions are confidential and will remain so, unless you have good reason to believe them to be a danger to themselves or others.





If signs of a safety risk are present



Ask the student directly if they are considering suicide. If a student is not contemplating suicide, asking about it will not introduce them to the option or 'put ideas in their head'.

**Emphasise**



that the relevant referral support structures have the knowledge, experience and resources to assist them in a more appropriate manner.

**Provide**



the name, phone number and location of the referral office or accompany the student to the relevant office.

**Arrange**



a follow-up appointment with the student to discuss the outcome.

***Counselling is a voluntary service and requires informed consent from the student. If a student does not wish to utilise the support services on offer, their wishes should be respected. Unless the student's situation or condition escalates to an emergency status, no further action is necessary at this stage.***



# 6. Emergency Situations

In a crisis situation, where a student is highly distressed, an emergency appointment can be made at SCD. This appointment consists of a containment session to evaluate the situation and make the necessary recommendations or referrals. These circumstances could include the following:

If a  
student

- is expressing suicidal thoughts
- is threatening self-harm
- appears to not be in touch with reality
- is expressing bizarre behaviour, ideas and thoughts
- appears overly agitated or aggressive

*In responding to a student in distress, staff should only act to the limit of their competencies. The appropriate course of action depends on the urgency of the situation, your relationship with the student and your level of experience.*

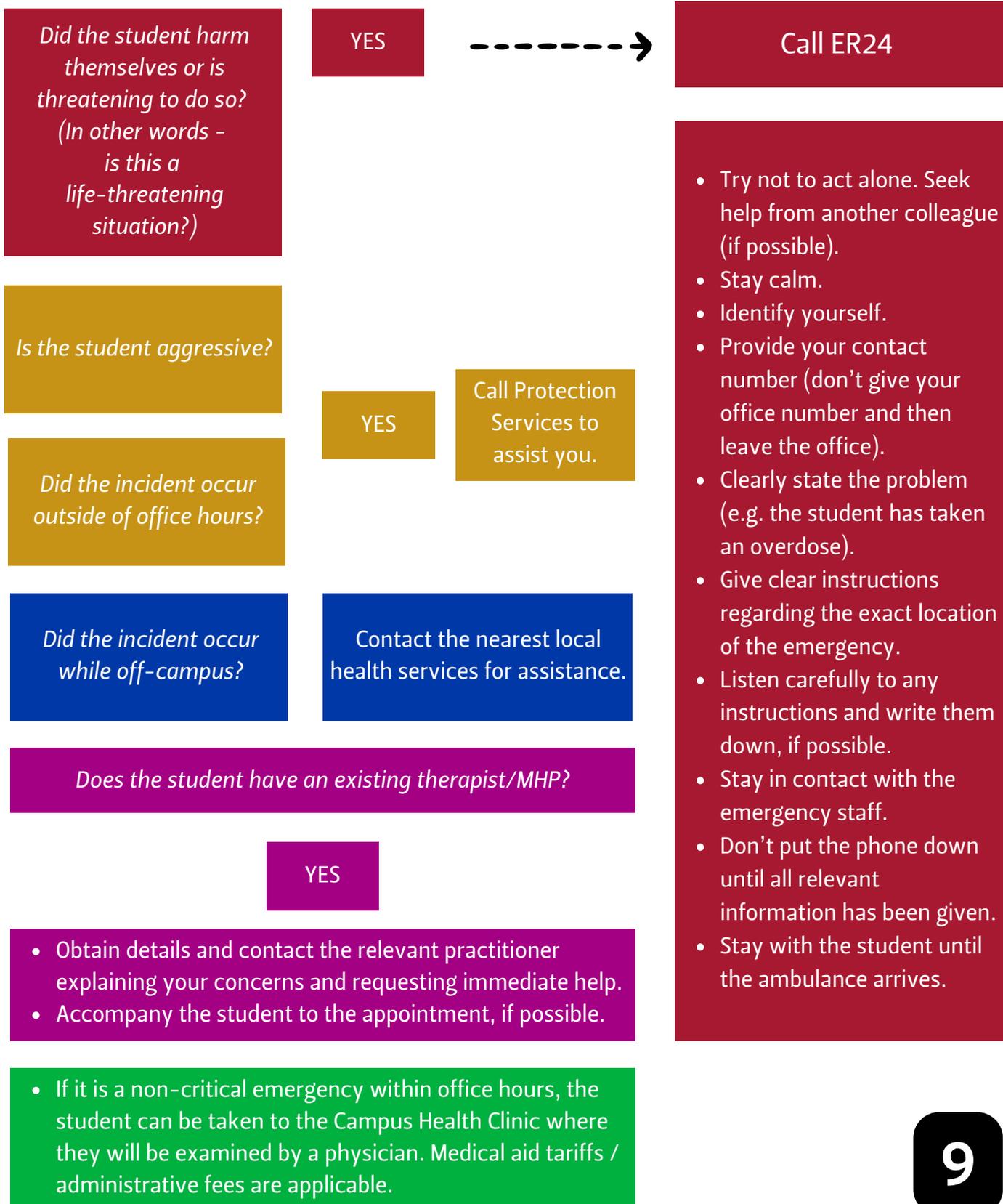


Emergency



# 7. What to do in emergency situations

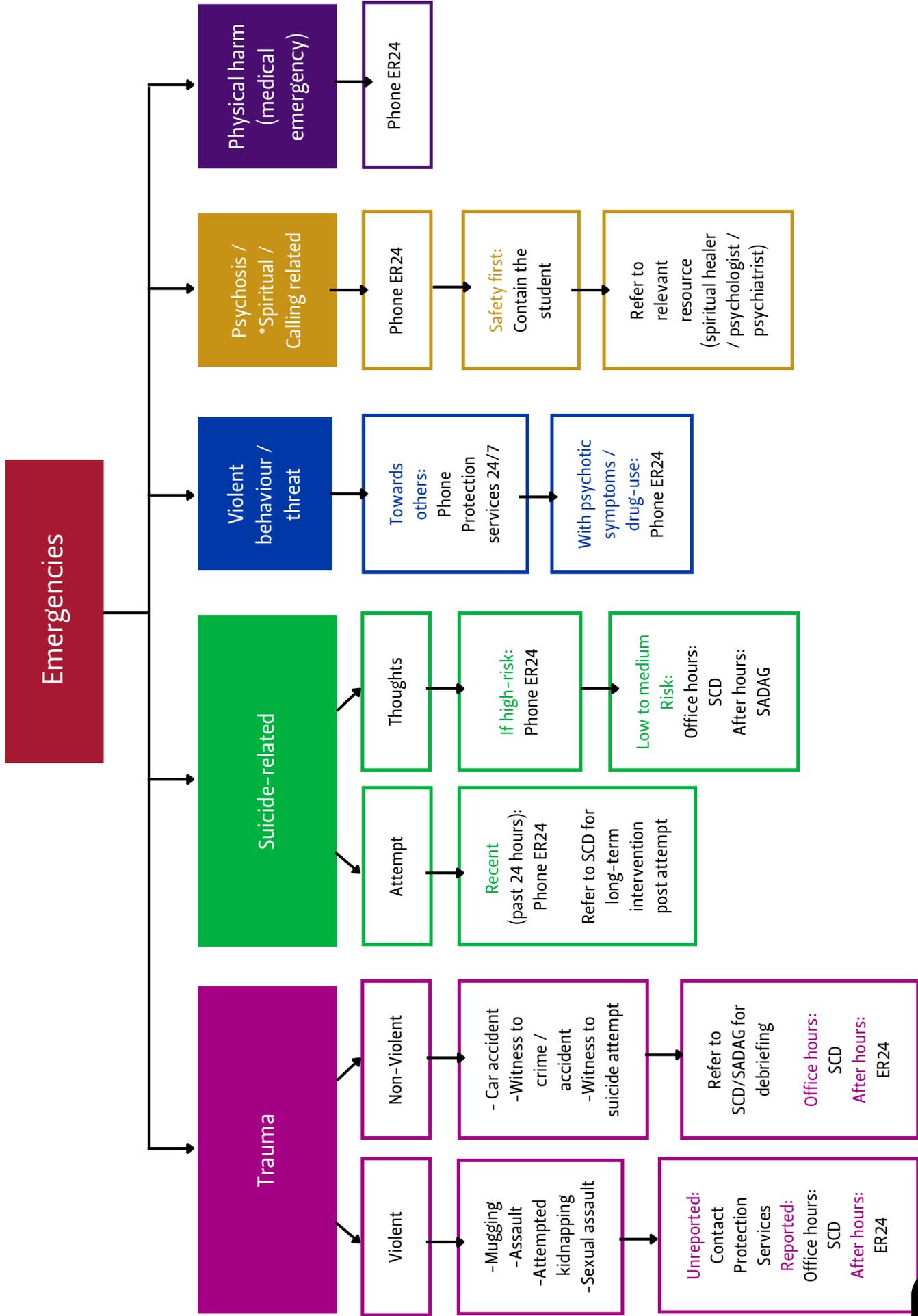
In situations where a staff member has become concerned about a student and believes them to be at immediate risk of harm to self or others, one or more of the following listed courses of action should be taken.



Call ER24

- Try not to act alone. Seek help from another colleague (if possible).
- Stay calm.
- Identify yourself.
- Provide your contact number (don't give your office number and then leave the office).
- Clearly state the problem (e.g. the student has taken an overdose).
- Give clear instructions regarding the exact location of the emergency.
- Listen carefully to any instructions and write them down, if possible.
- Stay in contact with the emergency staff.
- Don't put the phone down until all relevant information has been given.
- Stay with the student until the ambulance arrives.

# 8. Emergency Flowchart



# 9. Crisis Intervention Protocol

|                                     | SCD   | SADAG  | ER24   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Contact details</b>              | 051 401 2853 (Bfn)<br>058 718 5125 (QQ)<br>051 505 1989 (South)                 | 0800 00 6363   | 084 124  |
| <b>Time</b>                         | 07:45 - 16:30   | 24/7   | 24/7   |
| <b>Services available</b>           | Workshops<br>Programmes<br>Therapy<br>Career counselling<br>Crisis intervention | Telephonic counselling<br>Screening<br>Brief interventions<br>Referrals to other departments / resources | Crisis intervention<br>Physical assessment<br>Transport to hospital for further intervention |
| <b>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</b> | Long-term / Continuous interventions  | Brief crisis intervention<br>Screening & Referrals   | Crisis intervention  |
| <b>Type of intervention</b>         | Telephonic<br>Video<br>Face-to-face   | Telephonic   | Face-to-face   |
| <b>Referral sources</b>             | Self<br>SADAG & ER24<br>Broader UFS community (departments / residences etc)    | Self<br>SCD  | SCD<br>Student Affairs Heads<br>Protection services<br>Residence Heads                       |
| <b>Triage</b>                       | GREEN / ORANGE / RED  | GREEN / ORANGE   | RED  |

# 10.Examples of situations

## SCD

Developmental, long-term therapeutic processes. Referrals from SADAG & ER24 for ongoing therapy.

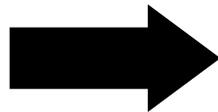
## SADAG

When student is in distress - they can phone SADAG 24/7. If student phones during night / after hours and is high risk – SADAG will refer to ER24.

## ER24

Suicide attempt. Psychotic episode. After emergency situations, such as psychotic episodes or suicide attempts, phone ER24.

**When a student:**



**Do this:**

Experiences a panic attack



Reassure them that they are okay and show them how to breathe through it. Reassure them that the panic attack will not last forever. Ask them if they are receiving support for panic/anxiety.

Is crying / in distress



Listen to them and speak in a calm, caring manner. Ask them if they would like to reach out to a loved one or a mental health professional for support.

Says that they just want to give up



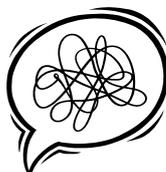
Listen to them and speak in a calm, caring manner. Offer various resources available to them (academic and psychological). Ask them if they would like to reach out to a mental health professional for support

Expresses feelings of anxiety



Listen and share with them the various resources available to them (academic and psychological).

Has self-harmed / attempted suicide



Call Protection services or the ambulance immediately. Contact the student's emergency contact.



Proudly compiled by  
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